

Upheaval as six FA Cup stars leave

NO non-league club can have undergone such a rapid change in fortunes as Blyth Spartans.

At the start of last season crowds were falling, a new inexperienced manager had just been appointed and they had to rebuild an ageing squad.

A year later they had made a record profit, gained an international reputation for their FA Cup run and won three trophies.

But how quickly fortunes change. For in the last two months Blyth have lost their manager, star player and several of their FA Cup squad of last season.

However, Wycombe fans can't look forward to the third round of the Trophy yet — Spartans are still packed with experience, skill, determination and the will to win.

FAIRY TALE

Last season was a fairy tale for Blyth. They captured the imagination of the country during their FA Cup run. They knocked out league sides Chesterfield and Stoke City and top non-league team Enfield.

They were eventually knocked out in the fifth round replay by Wrexham in front of a full house at Newcastle United's ground by 2-1.

The cup run brought Spar-

tans glory and a profit of £50,000.

They went on to defeat Wrexham in the Debenhams Cup Final and also won the Northumberland Senior Cup and Northern League Cup. Spartans were runners-up in the Northern League and were its top goalscorers.

The former Blyth striker, Brian Slane, who took over as manager at the start of the season could not have had a better start to his managerial career.

RESIGNED

But Slane resigned six weeks ago because running the club was putting too much strain on his business and personal life. His place has been taken by the club coach and former manager, Jack Marks.

Blyth's star player, striker Alan Shoulder, was snapped up by Newcastle United for £10,000 after scoring twice against York City in this season's FA Cup first round. Altogether six of last season's FA Cup heroes have left the club.

But despite all this Spartans are still second in the Northern League and are a formidable side.

With Blyth's long Cup fighting tradition Wanderers will have to be at their very best if they hope to win or draw at Croft Park, Blyth.



RON GUTHRIE
... last season.

MEET SPARTANS STRONG SQUAD

Dave Clarke: Goalkeeper who joined Spartans at the start of last season from Gateshead. Previously kept goal for Newcastle United and Doncaster Rovers. He was named one of the top five non-league players in the country last season by the FA Football Annual.

John Waterson: Club captain and right back. Has been in the side for five years and is one of the most consistent players in the squad.

Alan Walker: Left back, who joined the club a month ago from Scottish Second Division side Berwick Rangers. Formerly played for Blyth's local rivals Ashington.

Ron Guthrie: Left back or mid-field player, Ron is in his last full season with Blyth. Formerly played for Newcastle United and Sunderland. He was a member of Sunderland's FA Cup winning side of 1973. His brother Chris plays for Fulham.

David Varty: Midfield man Dave became a regular in the side last season and took over from Blyth's veteran midfielder Eddie Alder. Dave is renowned for his speed and strength. The only native of Blyth in the team.

Tommy Dixon: Sweeper and iron man of the side. Joined the club four years ago and has hardly missed a game since. A fierce tackler and extremely brave.

Steve Dixon: A centre half, Steve was signed from Wearside League club Blue Star this season. A member of Blue Star's FA Vase winning team last season.

Keith Houghton: A midfield player whose strong tackling and dominance in the air played a big part in Blyth's FA Cup run last year. Formerly with Newcastle United and North Shields.

Mick Dagless: A creative mid-field player and the longest serving member of the side with seven years' service. Mick is

famed for his tremendous left foot shot.

Steve Carney: Utility player Steve is currently operating as a striker but can play just as well in midfield or in defence. Was sent off last season in the FA Cup against Wrexham and has a reputation as a hard player.

Terry Johnson: One of the top strikers in non-league football. Formerly with Newcastle United, Southend and Brentford. Scored 34 goals in 157 appearances for Southend. Is lethal in the box. He has just regained his place after breaking two toes in an FA Cup match at York City.

Peter Davies: Joined the club this season from Carlisle United as a striker. Operates on the right flank and has impressed Blyth fans with his spectacular shooting.

Micky Wall: A striker who has returned to top class non-league soccer after a spell in some minor leagues.



TERRY JOHNSON
... top striker.

A solitary spectator waits in vain for the start of Wycombe Wanderers' league match against Barking at a snow-covered Lookes Park on Saturday. The match was postponed as was the Blues' County Senior Cup-tie against Maidenhead on Tuesday night.